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By John Guzzon

In less than 15 years, The PENTA Building Group has gone from startup to one of the region's biggest contractors. According to ENR Southwest's Top Contractors survey, the firm's regional revenue in 2014 was \$277.8 million, more than double 2011 revenue of about \$120 million and an increase of \$40 million from 2013. PENTA was ranked fifth in Southwest revenue and second in Nevada revenue.

Beyond the technical and professional skills of PENTA's staff, the main reason for such growth, according to those who have worked with PENTA, can be traced back to its culture of teamwork.

"They have one of the best cultures in the Southwest," says Sam Nicholson of Grand Canyon Consultants. "They have a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration, which makes the project go much faster at lower costs and with fewer claims."

With a commitment to service and some of the highest revenue in the region, PENTA Building Group was named ENR Southwest Contractor of the Year by ENR editors.

Putting Projects in Place

Founding principals Jeff Ehret, Ken Alber and Blake Anderson—known within the firm as "JKB"—went out on their own with PENTA in 2001 after accumulating decades of project experience, mostly with Perini Corp. The firm soon acquired a string of significant general contractor jobs, focusing mainly on the Vegas gaming and hospitality market—work that would pay big dividends later in Palm Springs, Calif., on projects for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

Growing to become one of the Southwest's largest contractors wasn't envisioned by Ehret, Alber and Anderson back in 2001, though.

"We thought we would be a medium-size Las Vegas contractor," Ehret, president of PENTA, says today.

John Cannito, company COO, credits Ehret, Alber and Anderson for the firm's early successes and its culture. "There's not a real big ego here," he says. "One thing they do really well is work through issues. They are strong as individuals, but combined they are a great team. The three of them never let anything get petty."

"We know what we do well," he adds, "and we know what we don't do well. We're builders."

Cannito had worked for Ehret and Alber at Perini and knew Anderson, too. "JKB" reached out to Cannito in 2004 as part of what Ehret calls a "peer-review" to consult on PENTA's potential business growth after the firm ended up winning more projects in its first four years than leadership had originally expected. Cannito was working full-time at PENTA by the time the review was completed.

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Work kept coming and by the time the recession hit, the firm had completed nearly 500 projects with a combined value of more than \$2.4 billion. Projects in Las Vegas included a new headquarters for the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Dept.; the University of Nevada-Las Vegas student union; the Caesars Convention Center; and a collection of other projects at the resort and elsewhere. The firm also oversaw construction of Rush Tower at the Golden Nugget as well as the remodeling of the former Las Vegas City Hall into the new Zappos.com corporate headquarters.

Among its current projects, the firm is partnering with Hunt Construction Group to build MGM Resorts International's \$375-million Las Vegas Arena—the first noncollegiate arena in Las Vegas. The 20,000-seat venue will feature 50 luxury suites, 25 luxury loge boxes as well as outdoor balconies.

The firm is also working with Hunt on the \$250-million West Valley Resort in Glendale, Ariz. Expected to surpass 1 million sq ft, the facility's planned features include a casino with a 75,000-sq-ft gaming floor, a 400-room resort hotel, restaurants, spas and other amenities.